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Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories

Written statement* submitted by Institute for NGO Research, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

Institute for NGO Research:

Protecting International Assistance from Terror-Linked UN Partners

In August 2019, Palestinian terrorists from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) murdered a 17-year old Israeli girl and severely injured her father and brother. The alleged perpetrators, currently standing trial for the terror attack, had day jobs.

They were employees of a Palestinian non-governmental organization (NGO), in receipt of tens of millions of dollars in humanitarian aid funding from the EU, the Netherlands, and even the UN.

The fact that the alleged PFLP terrorists were employed by this particular NGO is no coincidence. According to a USAID-engaged audit, the NGO was founded as the agricultural arm of the PFLP. In addition to these alleged murderers, the group has had among its ranks several board members and employees linked to the PFLP. It should be shocking that an organization with such credentials could garner so much foreign aid. But the EU and other European countries are notoriously lax when it comes to due diligence and enforcing terror financing laws. The United Nations is even more problematic.

In contrast, the United States represents the gold standard when it comes to international aid vetting mechanisms – though they can certainly be improved. USAID implements robust procedures to ensure that US taxpayer dollars are not provided to organizations with ties to terrorism, or that promote violence and hatred.

Unfortunately, however, substantial amounts of aid are often transferred to UN bodies that do not share the same commitments, particularly when it comes to Palestinians. In other words, taxpayer funds provided to the UN, often fall into the wrong hands.

The same PFLP-affiliated NGO, whose employees now stand accused of murder, is listed as a partner on 3 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2018-2022 projects, totaling approximately \$27 million.

The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is another prime example. OCHA is the UN agency tasked with coordinating "the global emergency response to save lives and protect people in humanitarian crises." In the West Bank and Gaza, OCHA's local branch (OCHA-oPt) is responsible for coordinating more than 20 UN agencies, executing the UN's humanitarian response plan, facilitating donations to dozens of NGOs operating in the region, and providing direct funding to local NGOs.

As documented by NGO Monitor, OCHA-oPt relies on terror-linked actors, even incorporating them into decision-making frameworks. For instance, some of these NGOs –strongly influence OCHA-oPt projects and funding as members of its Humanitarian Country Team and Cluster groups. Many of these groups are also associated with other OCHA-oPt frameworks and are frequent partners and funding recipients in OCHA-oPt-facilitated projects.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is another notable example. Like OCHA-oPt, UNICEF's Palestinian branch disturbingly partners with several PFLP-linked organizations and even relies on them as the basis for reports accusing Israel of abusing Palestinian children.

When we presented the evidence to UNICEF Palestine, the officials simply responded that it was only barred from working with terrorist organizations on the UN terror list – a list that, due to anti-Israel animus, deliberately excludes Palestinian groups. This excuse also ignores the fact that the PFLP is designated as a terrorist organization by many of UNICEF's biggest donor governments.

These troubling examples are not unique and demonstrate the critical need for greater oversight over UN agencies and the activities of its local branches.

More broadly, donor governments should insist on applying their own vetting requirements and standards when funding UN projects where there is a significant risk of terrorist involvement. Organizations that do not meet the criteria for receiving direct support should not be offered a backdoor method (such as via UN agencies) for obtaining it.

Until the UN system at large, and OCHA-oPt and UNICEF Palestine specifically, cease their engagement with terror-linked actors, lawmakers and diplomats should institute appropriate measures to safeguard taxpayer money.
